

HAS THE THIRD WORLD WAR ALREADY STARTED?

By Midge Decter

Midge Decter is executive director of the Committee for the Free World, a New York-based group through which leading figures in many countries have united behind the simple cause the committee's name implies.

Mrs. Decter is the author of three books: The Liberated Woman and Other Americans, The New Chastity, and Liberal Parents, Radical Children. Her essays and reviews, mostly in the field of social criticism, have over the past two decades appeared in a number of periodicals, including Harper's, The Atlantic, Exquire, and Saturday Review. She has been acting managing editor of Commentary, executive editor of Harper's, literary editor of Saturday Review, and senior editor at Basic Books.

Midge Decter is a founder and past chairman of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority; co-chairman of the Advisory Committee on European Democracy and Security; and a member of the board of the Committee on the Present Danger.

She delivered this address at the third Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar of the 1981-82 academic year, held February 1-4 on the topic, "Preventing World War III." Other speakers at the seminar included defense scholar Robert Pfaltzgraff debating David Cortright of SANE; William Colby on the CIA; Generals Daniel Graham and George Keegan on strategic weapons and deterrence; conflict resolution specialist George Lopez on "waging peace"; and Czech émigré Libor Brom, a former political prisoner of both the Nazis and the Soviets.

World War III, the ostensible subject of these observations, is not so much a war as a specter that has haunted all our public deliberations for at least thirty years. The ghost of that great and final War Future has been invoked on every occasion—from the smallest to the most magnified—when people wished to counsel American inaction. We must not arm, it has been



said over and over, because an excess of armaments will by itself one day inevitably set off nuclear armageddon. We must not take this action or that action lest it lead—accidentally, beyond our control—to a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union and thus inescapably to worldwide extinction. Meanwhile, of course, literally hundreds of wars have been engaged in all over the globe since World War II—all of them made possible by the fact (sometimes it was an illusion) that they fell short of being a *world* war, that is, a conflict between the two great superpowers.

Recently, Richard Nixon also invoked the ghost of World War III, but he meant something different by it. For him the ghost was the ghost of War Past. By this I mean that the members of Richard Nixon's generation, and the members of my own, are haunted by a world

im·pri·mis (im-pri-mis) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin in primis, among the first (things)....

Imprimis is the journal of Hillsdale's two outreach programs seeking to foster clear thinking on the problems of our time: the Center for Constructive Alternatives in Michigan, and the Shavano Institute for National Leadership in Colorado. A subscription is free on request.

war we can remember and particularly by the years that led up to it. In the history books World War II commenced in September 1939. Looking back now, however, we can see that it actually commenced five years earlier, when Hitler marched into the Rhineland unopposed, and the governments who were to be known as the Allied powers by their inaction and self-deception and wishful dreaming (for it cannot be dignified with the word "thinking") made a world war inevitable by failing to stop it before it could get started.

Winston Churchill called World War II "the unnecessary war." What he meant by this was that the proper show of will and force at the right time, when Hitler was yet weak, would have stopped him in his tracks. This is what Richard Nixon, and others, mean these days when they speak of World War III. The members of his generation, and the members of mine, are asking now, Is this 1935, or 1938, or even 1939? Has the war we cannot yet see already commenced as a result of our undeniable failure to hold the line against Soviet aggression? (The irony of Richard Nixon's concern about this now, after he himself did so much to further the self-deception about Soviet desires and intentions in our own time, is a subject for another time.)

My own answer to the question is, I do not think so. Though it is very late, though the Soviet Union has, like Hitler in the middle '30s, moved unopposed—into Africa, Afghanistan, and to some extent into the Middle East, not to mention, of course, the crushing of Poland (for the how-manyeth time in our century?) going on before our eyes—despite all this, we are not altogether in the condition of the Western democracies in the '30s. True, we are inadequately armed. True, the counsellors of "peace at any price" and "peace in our time" are vocal, and still highly influential, among us. Yet the answer to the question of our behavior in the coming years is still not settled. The election of 1980 bespeaks a different condition from that which had so fatally overtaken Western Europe in the 1930s.

Thus, before we go on to a careful—and I must confess to you, not completely cheerful—description of where we are now on the scale of war and peace, we must stop and think for a few moments about the meaning of 1980.

I think it is true—though far from safe—to say that in this vast agglomeration of groups and regions and races and classes we call the United States of America nothing is nevertheless easier to read than the public temper. The pundits would not thank me for saying this, I know. We have in our midst a large number of powerful people—some are journalists, some are social scientists, some are members of that arcane new profession, "consultants"—who make a living, often a very good living, trying to convince us all that popular opinion is a mysterious and volatile substance, a substance whose properties and behavior are subject to laws that only trained experts can understand.

I have often, for instance, pondered the practice of the television networks in connection with important presidential speeches. The President announces a new initiative, say, or defends a policy, or speaks at length on the state of the nation, and no sooner has he finished than there are experts or panels of experts standing by to tell a presumably incompetent populace what he has just said, along with what he has just not said and what people are likely to think and feel about it. We know, of course, to whom these experts are speaking: to one another. They are preparing the next day's betting line on presidential-popular relations. And they create confusions that, circularly, only they will be able to clear up next time around by creating yet new confusions.

I do not mean to go on about this, but only to make a simple point. I wish to begin with the proposition that we know what most of the American people want the role of the United States in world affairs to be. We know it because they have said so, and the evidence that they have said so is the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency.

The year 1980 is important: it was simply inconceivable five or ten years ago that Ronald Reagan could have become president. Just as it was inconceivable in 1980 that anyone *but* Ronald Reagan would become president. As what has become known as a neo-conservative—I have surrendered to the title though neither I nor anyone else knows exactly what it means—I was far more certain of this outcome than many of my friends who had been wandering with Reagan faithfully for years in the minority wilderness. I was more certain not because of any superior wisdom but because I had the great advantage of taking this country's shift to Reagan on my own pulse. And one's own pulse, one's own *true* pulse, is the place to read the country's temper.

"Make us great again"

What, then, were people saying—what was *I* saying—when we graced him with a landslide victory and helped him to carry so many of his party into the Senate? To be sure, people were saying a certain number of different things: that the liberal Great Society had gone much, much too far; that the government had become a monster; that the country's values had gone well more than halfway to hell down the slippery slope of radical nihilism and liberal relativism; that we had, to put it most succinctly, to pull ourselves together again. But most of all they were, in the reflection of Ronald Reagan, granting themselves permission to see their country once more as a great and decent power. Both. Great...and...decent—indeed, a model of political and social decency, the kind of country, the kind of society, that others in the world would be fortunate to have the opportunity to emulate.

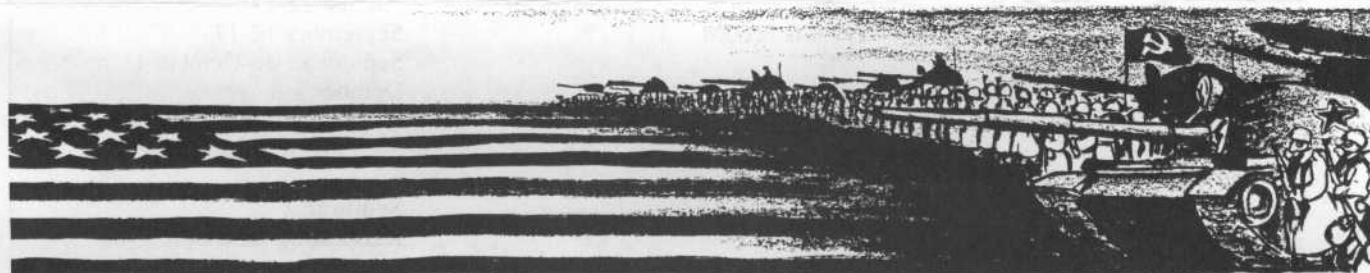
I think I do not have to rehearse once more what had interfered with Americans' capacity to think of their

country this way. Each of us has his own list of the events and influences that served to crack America's sense of purpose and self-esteem (which are, for this odd and singular nation, the same thing). Besides, as I look back over the past two decades, I am not sure that we actually do know yet all that happened to us. Which, for instance, came first, the endless, victoryless slogging in Vietnam or the idea that the country was no longer entitled to declare itself the defender of the free world? Let us just say what we can all agree upon—that the country was hit by a plague, a blight, a seizure of self-hatred that in the end left it gasping and helpless before the insults and depredations, and worse, of even the smallest, weakest enemies.

The point is that the election of 1980 was the coming to fruition of a feeling that had been growing in the country bit by bit over the 1970s and that could no

This belief may have led to a certain amount of naive, even foolish talk. It may have led to certain wasteful and even futile policies, especially toward many of those countries now fashionably designated as the Third World. But the American people were right; their country *was* a force for social good in the world, social good that very much includes peace. Nowhere can one point to a single group of people—except for tinpot tyrants and their murdering myrmidons—who are better off as a result of the country's (as I believe, temporary) abandonment of this belief. And in many places millions upon millions of people are distinctly worse off.

Thus Reagan's mandate in January 1981 was not simply to slow the metastatic growth of government, though it was that, to be sure—and not simply to undertake a massive increase in our now dangerously



longer be held off by the rhetorical tricks of those in power. I have defined this feeling in the simplest of terms because it is a simple feeling: *Make us great again.*

Now, the word "great" for Americans does not only mean powerful and rich, though certainly that; it also means, and has always meant, in Reagan's own words, make us the City on the Hill.

There are those—clever Europeans, wise old men like George Kennan, even, I think, Richard Nixon—who find our definition of greatness childish, hardly in keeping with the proper interests and purposes of great world powers. But these clever and wise people are wrong. So-called hard-headed statecraft, based on a worldly and limited definition of national interests, has twice in this century turned Europe into a bloody wasteland, a scene of carnage to boggle the minds of all generations who lived before. Whereas it has been the American notion that the West is a civilization and a political culture which it is our duty to protect from the barbarities of Soviet Communism, that has led to policies which kept the peace in Europe for the past 37 years. Whatever the so-called wise men tell us, the Cold War—and why should we not commence to use that term proudly, without inverted commas—the Cold War was first made possible and then sustained at considerable cost by the belief of the American people that their country was acting as a force for social good in the world:

depleted military strength, though it was certainly that—but to return the country to its rightful, necessary, and benign role as leader of the free world.

In other words, the simple feeling that led to the election of Ronald Reagan is not only a wish to be strong but a yearning to see more of the world—perhaps one day all of the world—peaceably enjoying that which we enjoy, and treasure. Yet, alas, this is not the end of the story.

For the clever and the wise and the sophisticated—and they are rife in the Reagan administration as in every other—these would-be architects of a "sensible" and hard-nosed world order are still much in power. They say in objection to what I have called the country's simple feeling: the world is an ever more complicated place; what people like you are talking about is naive and gives no guidance to policy. My answer to them is, what I am talking about *is* a policy.

Only two choices

The fact of the matter is that in a world more and more of whose real estate is coming to stand in the shadow of the Soviet empire, in such a world, the world we inhabit today, the United States has only *two* choices of policy. The rest is, as in the '30s, self-deception and dreaming. Indeed, the adviser most to be trusted by the President of the United States would be the man who, when asked to lay out all the options before us at this moment, would present the President

with a single sheet of paper on which were written only two sentences: (a) we have the option to do everything in our power to undermine the economic, political, and military strength of our enemy—and, as it happens, in a time of golden opportunity to do so; or (b) we have the option of accommodating ourselves to the ever-increasing spread of the enemy's power, a power which at this moment threatens to castrate our friends and allies and, after them, us.

So far, then, we must face the fact that whether Reagan knows it or not, option b has continued to be the policy of his administration. Not the language of his administration, and language *is* important. Not the desire of his administration, and desire is vitally important. But nevertheless, alas, the *policy* of his administration. That is why my question about World War III cannot yet be answered with assurance.

Now, accommodation to spreading Soviet power can take, and has taken, many forms, each of them, of course, called by another name. There is the discredited Nixon Doctrine—discredited, one would have thought, for all time in Iran, yet now being applied with the same degree of what the psychologists would call “denial” to Saudi Arabia. This doctrine is based on the seductive idea that we can, with a sufficient supply of extremely sophisticated weaponry, rely on surrogates to protect our interests. Even if such surrogates were stable and reliable, which they are not, how could they be counted on to fulfill their role as the protectors of our interests when they see us behaving weakly in relation to *them*? In the foreseeable future, the economic survival of our friends, and therefore in the long run, our own, depends upon unimpeded access to Middle Eastern oil. The only way, and the proper way, for us to insure such access—and to keep the Soviet Union ultimately from determining it—is the stationing of American troops in the Middle East. If *we* do not know this, the Arab nations certainly do. What have we done? Politely ask, and meekly accept the refusal of our would-be protector. Is this how a serious, let alone a great, power behaves? I cannot believe that the Saudis think so, whatever one reads on the op-ed pages of our great metropolitan newspapers.

A second form of accommodation is our continued willingness to cling to that talisman of the self-deceived called “negotiation.” To be, even if only for appearance's sake, negotiating with our enemy when there is nothing on our side to negotiate about or with, when we have openly acknowledged our *military* disadvantage, and have at the same time eschewed pressing the enemy's *economic* disadvantage, even to pretend to negotiate is to entrap ourselves in an accommodation. We negotiate to show the world that we are not unreasonable people. But it is in the logic of negotiations that they culminate in an agreement. And any agreement now can but disadvantage us. Thus while applauding us for our reasonableness, our allies, like

our would-be surrogates, must deep down be feeling the opposite of what they are saying—namely, that we must be in an unreasonable condition indeed. *They* cheer us because they wish us to surrender. Not because they fear that we will make war—they know perfectly well whose war-making machine threatens them—but because they do not wish to be interrupted in their own downhill rush to accommodation.

Take the recent “zero option” proposed by Reagan. The proposal is not only brilliant but self-evident: if the Soviets remove their intermediate-range missiles, the United States will not deploy its. Neither the Europeans nor certain members of the Reagan administration now appear to understand that such a proposal is what the students used to call “non-negotiable.” Either the Soviets will remove their missiles or they will not. Yet we negotiate. We sat at the Helsinki conference in Madrid for more than a year reviewing with the Russians an agreement every one of whose terms they have violated—a treaty which gave them something of vital importance, our acknowledgement of their hegemony in Eastern Europe, and gave us what?—the privilege of sharing with their scholars the secrets of our newest and most brilliant technology. And now we are in Geneva—to do what? To reward the Soviets for a decade's worth of blackmail with the privilege of attempting further extortions of us? It is hard not to believe that were Ronald Reagan not in the White House, he would be leading the opposition to the Helsinki Agreements, which should be abrogated as a failure of American policy, and to the Geneva negotiations, which are, to say the least, several years premature.

Another form of accommodation is our policy of seeking consensus at the United Nations. Since that body has become little more than a weapon aimed at the heart of the U.S. policy, a forum for anti-American hypocrisy and mendacity, why do we continue to play the game there? (What can be the meaning of the fact that in a universally turbulent world, with wars and civil wars raging from one end to the other, with terrorism unbridled, 85 percent of the UN's time in recent years has been devoted to Israel and South Africa—85 percent!) Perhaps we should just pull out—I myself would so advocate, though I agree that the question is arguable. But if we remain in, to continue on, as we are, behaving as active participants in its deliberations, allowing ourselves to be caught in the toils of such rank, destructive madness as “global negotiations,” (there is that talisman “negotiations” again)—all this remains no more than simply an accommodation to the enemy.

Indeed, to lose clarity, as so many among us have, and to imagine that the world offers us any but two stark alternatives, is itself both the result of accommodations already made and—my greatest fear—a harbinger of more to come.

Let me explain what I mean by mentioning the most urgent, and most exemplary, case before us, a case that collects to it most of the major issues facing Reagan's foreign policy. I mean, of course, Poland. Here, too, the choice has been simple, and since time is fast running out (in fact, it has probably already run out) on the Polish question as far as we are concerned, it may have to be recorded that the United States was granted the opportunity of a grave and entirely self-generated crisis of Soviet totalitarianism and actively *helped* the Soviets to manage it. In this, we *are* like Britain and France facing Hitler's conquest of the Rhineland. At the behest of some of our allies, who *want* the Polish crisis to go away, who want Jaruselski to succeed and quickly, so that they may return to their life of trading and dreaming and most of all evading the truth about their situation, we have responded "with restraint." We have lit candles and rescinded some minor economic agreements and shut down two weekly LOT flights. We have said we will do worse, if...if things get worse. But things are *already* worse—as they were already worse in 1935. We have said that we will not return to our former relations with Poland until martial law is lifted. But what does this actually *mean*? That when Jaruselski restores order, the order of the grave, so that he can take the troops out of the streets, he will be rewarded for his success in having betrayed his own people by a resumption of relations with us. If this turns out to be the case, what will future generations, struggling with their own issues of freedom, have to say of us? Will we blush with shame from the very grave?

Reagan our Churchill?

When I said that one of the two options before us was to do everything in our power to undermine our enemy, German, Dutch and British youth to the contrary notwithstanding, I did not of course mean that we should set off a nuclear or even a conventional war. Nor did I mean that we should incite others to be freedom fighters in a situation where there is no chance that we will give them military support. But we do have leverage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, very real leverage, and we should use it. The Soviets are after all in serious difficulty; they know it and the world knows it. They *need* us. Therefore by withholding from them that which they and their system, and any and every totalitarian system, cannot produce for themselves, we undermine them. What they cannot produce is food, wealth, incentive to technological creativity, and well-being among their citizens. In the name of keeping the peace by making them more at ease in the world (the basic idea underlying detente)—and, I am afraid, in the name of short-term, self-destructive greed as well—we have helped them to keep a grip on their otherwise

faltering control over their populations. The object, we were told, was to entangle them in a web of economic relations with us and by so doing, help to bring them into the community of civilized nations. But it is we who were entrapped: our banks, our businesses, our governments—most of all, the minds of our policy-makers.

It is precisely to rescue us from this trap of confused and obfuscated intentions that Ronald Reagan was elected. It could be no quick or easy job, such a rescue. It would not be fair, or even sane, to expect that a dozen years' worth of failed policy could be overcome in a year. But our weakness in the Middle East, our presence at Geneva, our continuing relation to the UN, and the moral and political shame of our response to Poland make the winter of '82 seem even colder and darker and grimmer than nature has made it.

There seems to me little use in asking who or what is responsible for our current anxiety. This is not a moment for recrimination. And we have had so much recrimination in our national life of the last decade—a lifetime's worth. It is rather a moment for urgent appeal. What is missing from the Reagan foreign policy, it seems to me, is that first, primary, stark clarity of intention. Do we wish, if we can, to preside over the beginning of the breakup of the Soviet empire? Or do we wish to accommodate ourselves to the idea that we may one day find ourselves all alone in a sea of grim and envious and unfree people? I think the voters have already answered this question for themselves. Reagan has heard them but he has yet to take heart from them. Washington is a difficult place to stay in touch with America. It is also a difficult place for a President to stay in touch with himself. Reagan must remember what he once knew so clearly. It is our job to make him remember and help him remember: we have come to that kind of watershed in history where if we are not truly, fully, and staunchly against them, we will inevitably be for them.

I am aware as I stand before you how extreme this sounds. Those who think as I do must learn to bear the charge of extremism. It was the charge leveled at many who spoke as I now speak in the mid-'30s. But unlike the British in those years, we have not turned our backs on the man who must now be our Winston Churchill; we have elected him. We must *make* him listen to *us* and not to the others who have prettier things to say, perhaps, but whose counsels are the counsels of despair and folly. They speak of peace, but it is they who will bring us to World War III. The American people have willed otherwise. They deserve to enjoy the fruits of their collective wisdom.

Management Training Seminars at Hillsdale College

Dear Friends:

It is my pleasure to invite you to attend management training seminars at our well-known Dow Conference Center, one of the best equipped training facilities in the country. This year we began our 29th year of service to business and industrial organizations in training managers and supervisors to lead more effectively.

George C. Roche III
President

Seminar 1 - Self-Analysis for Managers:

To know one's self better is the gateway to better management. Management of others begins with management of self. The major purpose of Self-Analysis for Managers is to help the individual learn more about the person he is, to help him discover the areas in which he does well and those in which further self-improvement is needed.

Seminar 2 - Manager Development I: Working With the Individual

This program emphasizes relationships between the manager and individuals in the work environment. The manager will gain a better understanding of himself and others and consequently a better understanding of the managerial process.

Participants will have the opportunity of learning how to: understand why people see things as they do, get better results from employees through improved coaching and training, understand what motivates people, pinpoint problems, develop alternatives and make final decisions, appraise performance, and manage time.

Seminar 3 - Manager Development II: Working with the Individual

This program focuses on the manager's role in working with groups. Emphasis is given to group dynamics and their application to the work environment.

The participant will have the opportunity of learning how to: develop effective work teams, better understand his position as a leader, communicate more effectively with groups, facilitate employee involvement and participation, employ effective training programs and use career planning as a tool.

Fees for seminars above are:

Registration (includes tuition and training materials):

\$585 per person.

Room & meals (American plan, includes evening social hours and coffee breaks):

\$71 per person, per day.

**For information regarding seminars
contact:**

Michael E. Kolivosky, Ph.D.
Dean of Continuing Education

**For information regarding reservations
contact:**

Mrs. Marjory Breeden
Reservation Coordinator

**Dow Conference Center
Hillsdale College
Hillsdale, MI 49242
(517) 437-3311**

Seminar 1

Remaining Dates for 1982

April 25-30

June 20-25

August 22-27

September 12-17

September 26-October 1

October 3-8

November 7-12

November 28-December 3

Seminar 2

Remaining Dates for 1982

May 23-28

Seminar 3

Remaining Dates for 1982

November 14-19